

Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, eds, *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2019; 240 pp.; 10 b/w illus.; 9781350065086, £85.00 (hbk); 9781350065093, £91.80 (ebook)

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*Rethinking Historical Time* develops the argument that in the early twenty-first century we witness a loss of the linear temporal order and are confronted with an increasing presentism. Our sense of historical depth has been replaced by a width of the present. It diagnoses that our primary time reference is not any more the future we are longing for, but the present as a broad and fuzzy dimension of time. In this sense the title of the volume already hints at its ambitious agenda: the need for re-discussing and re-defining historical time at a moment when it is declining in importance as a social consensus. Modern terms of time's development and progress have lost their evidence and persuasiveness, hence historical time itself is stuck in a crisis and has to be rediscovered beyond the previously predominant linear framework. How can we even think of historical time if not as a diachronic index of transformation, but as a synchronic field of heterogeneous temporal references?

The umbrella of ‘New Approaches to Presentism’ serves the editors, the Estonian cultural historian Marek Tamm and the French archaeologist Laurent Olivier, as an approach to investigate ‘contemporary conceptualizations of time’ (3) in an interdisciplinary manner. Therefore, they have invited contributors from a wide range of fields, from archaeology to history and art history, from philosophy and heritage studies as well as literature and cultural studies to anthropology and geography. Departing from debates on time in history, referring to the essential theories of historical time of Henri Bergson, Reinhart Koselleck, François Hartog and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, the authors address the key question of the consequences of presentism and want to capture the contemporary transformation of the time regime. To achieve this goal, the contributions are divided into three sections, two of them following more theoretical paths – ‘Presentism and New Temporalities’ and ‘Multiple Temporalities’ – followed by one on ‘Material Temporalities’ that illustrates the consequences of thinking time in a presentist way.

The theoretical ground is laid by Chris Lorenz’s article discussing François Hartog’s concept of ‘presentism’ as a highly ambiguous term, which could refer either to the present as a transitory dimension of time or to an ideal type of a specific ‘order of time’ (23). To speak of ‘presentism’ following Hartog – chronologically or conceptually – therefore has to be recognized as a challenging, but worthy endeavour. Against this backdrop Helge Jordheim hints at a basic concept of history, chronology, and argues for its understanding as an auxiliary vehicle to tame history by grounding it upon a metrical system of definite temporal descriptions and indices. That each temporal reference, even a bare chronology, has its normative implications clarifies Victoria Fareld focusing on recent cases of activism and protest against historically discredited memorial traditions. More radically, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon asks how a time concept that is not rooted in a processual, diachronic transformation anymore can be understood as historical at all ‘in the sense of retaining the possibility of change over time’ (72).

The problem of multiple temporal orientations is emphasized by Hans Ruin, who presents revolutionary events as key ‘Augenblicke’ (88) of the raising attention of temporality and historicity. In this regard thinking time requires an awareness of the moment. Liisi Keedus argues that the insight into time’s own historicity stimulated attempts to freeze time and the longing for a resting eternity, analysing Franz Rosenzweig’s and Mircea Eliade’s ontological writings. That time in history is always bound to material representations offering their own temporalities illustrates manifold articles on paintings (Johannes Grave) and photographs (Anne Fuchs), heritage sites (Torgeir Rinke Bandstad), antique furniture (Jean-Pierre Legendre and Laurence Ollivier), death and burial practices (Shannon Lee Dawdy), and the rewilding of an ecological site in Portugal (Caitlin DeSilvey).

The volume is closed by a wrap-up discussion by Aleida Assmann addressing some of the identified common challenges of the historicization of time. As such she emphasizes the relation of time and modernity; shifts in understanding history and historiography; the differences between pasts, or more precisely, a closed past

and a continuing, remembered past; the question of different appropriate viewpoints and scales analysing time's transformation and transformations of time(s); the evident plurality of temporalities and the possibility of historical experience as an experience of past times whose 'present' is only given by (im)material sources. This conclusion highlights the main risks and advantages of thinking of time historically presented in this volume. Time in history is undoubtedly an intellectual impertinence – but, as Tamm's and Olivier's effort with the topic shows convincingly, it is worthy of note and deeper discussion as time ever was and obviously will remain a key dimension of all historical thinking and practising.